

Current Developments



April 2005

From The State Conservationist - *Robert N. Jones*

Spring has always been a favorite time of year for me. It is a time of new beginnings, new growth, and new cycles. I think it is a very appropriate time to move to a new place and start a new experience - I will become the state conservationist in Alaska on May 15.

I have had a wonderful experience in Alabama and this will be my last article for the Alabama NRCS newsletter. I have thoroughly enjoyed my tenure in Alabama. I have great respect for the Alabama NRCS team, and I appreciate the contribution that each of you has made to ensure we get the job done here. I have lots of years behind me and I realize it's the people who are important. The programs will be implemented, but it is the association with co-

workers who make the journey enjoyable. Because of these close associations, there is a tug at my heart -- I will miss all of you.

When I access the Alaska NRCS web page, to the world it looks like Alabama's. The continuity reminds me that we are all about the same task.

While I leave with a lump in my throat, I also have a spark in my eye. Life is full of adventures, and I look forward to the challenges that await me in Alaska. I leave with a heartfelt "thanks." Best wishes to each of you as you carry on with the work in Alabama. The welcome mat is out if you ever venture up to "the last frontier!"

Bob

Alabama Employees Win National Awards

Mike Roden Is National RC&D Coordinator of the Year

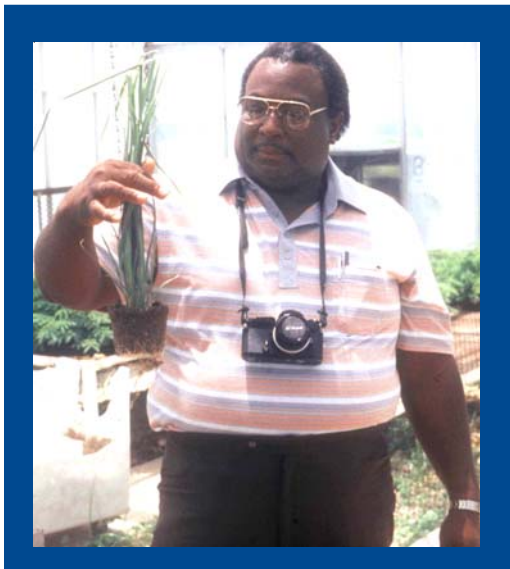
Cream rises to the top, and our own Mike Roden is the cream of the crop! Mike was selected as the National RC&D Coordinator of the Year for 2004. Mike received the award at the national meeting in Washington in March. From program development and implementation to fostering partnership involvement, Mike's innovative skills and abilities indicate he certainly is the best of the best. Mike is the first Alabama RC&D Coordinator to receive this prestigious award. Congratulations Mike!

Alabama
Mountains
Rivers and
Valleys RC&D
Council
Coordinator
Mike Roden (r)
accepts the
national award
from national
RC&D
President
Sharon Ruggi.



Don Surrency Wins National Award

Plant Materials National Program Leader Bob Eschelman announced in February 2005 the national winners of the Plant Materials Program Awards for 2004. Don Surrency, Plant Materials Specialist in Americus, Georgia, won the Plant Materials Meritorious Service that is presented to a Plant Materials employee who has made a significant and tangible contribution to the discipline over a long period of time. Don has contributed much over the years including outreach to limited resource farmers and promotion of constructed wetlands. His projects include improving water quality by encouraging many state and federal agencies and conservation partners to use constructed wetlands for residential areas and



commercial businesses. Don is also active in outreach to small farmers and promoting the use of plant materials for conservation, especially new plant releases and related technology,

for conservation and enhancement of natural resources.

Choctaw County DAC Wilma Newton is Honored at NCDEA Employee Choice Awards

Wilma Newton won the Outstanding District Professional award at National Conservation District Employee Association Employee Choice Awards.

Wilma has been the District Administrative Coordinator (DAC) in Choctaw County for 18 years. She was instrumental in forming the Alabama Association of Conservation District Employees, and served as the first President.

As President, Wilma led a campaign to change the District Clerk name to District Administrative Coordinator – which is more reflective of the position. She has served as President for four years and is currently Vice-President.



(l-r) Ann Labore, Cleburne County; Cherrie Haney, formerly with Cullman County; Wilma Newton; and Brenda Wigginton, Limestone County,

Special Award Honors Jerry Johnson

To honor Jerry L. Johnson, our former State Staff Forester, a new award has been developed with a grant from the Bradley/Murphy Forestry and Natural Resources Extension Trust. The Alabama Association of Conservation Districts and the State Soil and Water Conservation Committee will administer the grant.

Jerry's work and dedication positively impacted the forest, wildlife, and water resources of our state. He was steadfast in his belief and support of land stewardship principles. His dedication to conservation far exceeded his official duties.



This award seeks to recognize Alabama NRCS employees who exhibit the characteristics of Jerry Johnson's spirit and concern for his family, fellow employees, the environment, and his community.

After the selection criteria are developed, NRCS employees will be notified of the nomination procedures. If an NRCS employee meets the criteria and is selected for the award, a plaque and \$1,000 will be presented by NRCS at the annual meeting of the Alabama Association of Conservation Districts.

Outreach in Alabama

Goat and Sheep Festival in Talladega County

By Eddie May, DC, Talladega, AL

The crowd is expected to swell to 2,000 for the Goat and Sheep Festival May 7, 2005, at the Marianna Greene Henry Equestrian Arena near Talladega.

The speakers include Carla Shoemaker from Auburn University and Dr. Ralph Noble from Tuskegee University. Games and contests, along with prizes, will be fun activities for children. There will be working dog and a sheep shearing demonstrations. Different breeds of meat goats will be on display.

The USDA Outreach Coordinator from Washington is expected to attend and Alabama Public Television will be filming.

Come and join us from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m for quality information, an abundance of food, and lots of fun!



USDA Minority Farmer Register

The USDA Minority Farm Register is a tool to promote equal access to USDA farm programs and services for minority farmland owners, farmers, ranchers, tenants, and other individuals with an agricultural interest. Through outreach, participants

may receive information or be personally contacted. Participation on the Farm Register is voluntary. The information provided is shared through the USDA Office of Outreach with other

USDA-approved outreach partners such as community-based organizations, educational institutions, and other government agencies. Alabama recently held meetings to explain the program and to provide an opportunity for individuals to register. Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Vernon Parker introduced the Minority Register at the Federation of Southern Cooperatives Annual Conference in Epes, Alabama.



First Minority Farmers Conference Held in South Carolina

By Alice Love, Farm Bill Specialist, Auburn, AL

Alabama NRCS staff and farmers attended the 1st Minority Farmers Conference in Columbia, SC, in March. The event was a partnership effort of USDA; United Farmers USA, Inc.; South Carolina State University; and the Center for Minority Farmers. Conservation practices such as fencing and irrigation systems were discussed along with information about USDA programs that could be used to cost-share in the installation of these practices.

NRCS Chief Knight gave a brief overview of the department's goal to assist minority and limited resource farmers. Programs highlighted included the EQIP and CRP. Vernon Parker, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, explained the fair and equal assistance in the delivery of all USDA programs.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between USDA and the Marriott hotel chain was discussed. The MOU will help producers market their produce.



Alabama participants attending the conference are: (l-r) Rob Dickey, Ralph Brown, Regenia Gully, Gloria Bishop, Finest Miles, Jerry Cooper, Alvin Melton, John Melton, Willie Brown, Thomas Turner, and Andrew Williams. Not pictured-Alice Love.

NRCS Programs in Action

CSP Implemented in Alabama

The Wheeler Lake Watershed, located in portions of eight Alabama counties (Cullman, Jackson, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Limestone, Madison, Marshall, and Morgan) and four Tennessee counties (Franklin, Giles, Lawrence, and Lincoln) is a part of the 2005 Conservation Security Program (CSP). According to Ben Moore, CSP Coordinator in Alabama, "Unlike other conservation programs, CSP is not designed to 'fix' a problem. Rather, it is designed to recognize those who have implemented outstanding conservation practices through the years and to reward those who are willing to go the extra mile." NRCS held five workshops throughout the watershed to help producers understand the program and to provide information so they could determine if they were eligible or interested in applying for the program. Eligibility hinges on treating soil and water quality to specific levels. Since this is only the second year of the program (last year just a few pilot watersheds across the nation participated), and the first year for Alabama, there are still many unanswered questions.

A crucial part of the program involves farmer documentation of farm improvements. While there are still many unknowns, NRCS determined that early spring was the time for producers to begin looking at the program and to gather records before they got busy in the fields with spring planting. There was good participation at each of the workshops. Sign-up for the program is March 2-May 27, 2005.

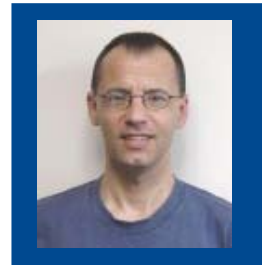


This workshop at Brewer High School in Morgan County was one of five held in the watershed area to provide producers information about the CSP program.

Alabama Soil Scientist Participates in Conference in Albania

By Zamir Libohova, Soil Scientist, MLRA, Tuscaloosa

I was very excited to be a member of the organizing committee and to present two posters at an international conference in Tirana, Albania, in March. Division 4 of the International Union of Soil Science, in cooperation with the Albanian Ministry of Agriculture; Albanian Ministry of Environment; Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation; Swiss Agency for the Environment, Forest, and Landscape; and the U.S. Agency for International Development held the conference entitled "Element Balances as a Tool for Sustainable Land Management." More than 90 researchers and specialists representing 18 countries participated.



The aim of the conference was to bring together stakeholders (soil scientists, agronomists, foresters, decision makers, etc.) concerned with sustainable land use issues to evaluate how mass balance approaches can be used for early recognition of environmental problems and the development of solutions. The focus of the conference was guidance for southern and eastern European countries, which have been subjected to dramatic political and social-economic changes during the last 15 years and are now facing land management problems during their transition to a free market economy similar to the ones faced in the past by Western European countries and the USA.

Presentations were given by 30 world-wide recognized experts and 32 posters were presented on issues such as soil erosion, soil sealing and consumption from construction, soil and water pollution from atmospheric depositions, waste disposal, and excessive application of fertilizers and pesticides. The participants were organized in four groups to discuss issues related to their respective countries and suggest solutions to problems related to a sustainable land use and management.

Access more information about the conference

<http://www.elementbalances05.org/>

<http://www.iuss.org/division4/publications.htm>

Cleanup of CRP Pine Stands after Hurricane Ivan

Hurricane Ivan hit Alabama in September 2004, bringing extensive damage and destruction, especially to the southwestern part of the state. If not harvested, timber damage in the 12 hardest hit counties is estimated to be more than \$400 million.

Pine plantations that had been recently thinned sustained the most wind damage. Thinning is a regular part of pine management and promotes growth of individual trees within a stand by removing surrounding trees that compete for water, sunlight, and soil nutrients. Thinning of a stand of trees is beneficial to the overall health, provides income, and improves wildlife habitat.

Many of the damaged stands across the state are enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). These stands are required by CRP guidelines to maintain at least 200 trees per acre unless a waiver is granted by the State Conservationist. As a result of the wide-spread damage, the State Conservationist



Damaged CRP stand after salvage operation.

has granted waivers on 52 CRP contracts allowing these stands to be salvaged below the 200 trees per acre minimum. The total CRP plantation acres thinned to date is 4,654.

This has been a great benefit to the landowners, allowing them to remain in the program and receive some compensation for the lost timber. These stands, even with less than 200 trees per acre, will meet the intent of the program: protecting our natural resources, improving and preserving water quality, and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat.

The low densities of these stands will also provide an additional benefit to wildlife populations, due to the increased light reaching the forest floor. The increased light, in conjunction with prescribed burning, will increase the yield and quality of herbage, legumes, and browse beneficial to wildlife.

The widespread devastation to the timber in Alabama warrants administrative relief in these circumstances and everyone involved is genuinely appreciative of the help.



CRP Pine Timber Damaged in Geneva County.



Farewell Bob and Kit Jones

**We wish you all the best as you
relocate to Alaska.**

**Good luck with the amphibian flight
lessons! Hope your days there will be
filled with unforgettable adventures.**

From your friends in Alabama!

RC&D Finds Workable Solutions for Tough Times

By Julie A. Best, PAS, Auburn, Alabama

The Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program has a way of finding solutions to problems. That's exactly the stance that the Cawaco RC&D Council took when they saw a need for help in the Five Mile Creek watershed north of Birmingham. According to Paul Kennedy, "Cawaco RC&D saw a problem, looked at the bank statement, and, instead of saying, 'we cannot help you,' we found a way to put a very bright individual in charge of a project that had gone unanswered for too long." That individual is Hilary Aten, a VISTA volunteer. VISTA is a program of AmeriCorps, the domestic Peace Corps where thousands of individuals are making a difference in communities across America.

Hilary grew up in northern Michigan on Lake Huron, went to school at Kalamazoo College, and earned an undergraduate degree in political science. After graduation, she moved to Arizona and worked in a domestic violence shelter. She decided to move from Arizona and started looking for other jobs. She found that many jobs require either a master's degree or several years of experience. "I was in limbo—I couldn't get a job without a master's degree and I couldn't get experience without a job," says Hilary. It was a dilemma, but there was an answer-- the Appalachian Watershed Development Team.

The Appalachian Watershed Development Team is a partnership between the Office of Surface Mining and the AmeriCorps VISTA. The primary goal of AmeriCorps VISTA is to address poverty issues, and the Office of Surface Mining has a program called the Appalachian Clean Stream Initiative to address acid mine drainage. Combining these two programs, the Appalachian Watershed Development Team was created. This program places VISTA volunteers in historic coal mining regions of Appalachia from Pennsylvania to Alabama where they work in grassroots watershed organizations to address water quality issues and economic problems associated with the history of coal mining.

Five Mile Creek, north of Birmingham, has suffered from decades of industrial, mining, and urban pollution and impact. After devastating floods in 2001-2003, the Five Mile Creek Greenway Partnership was formed to protect and preserve the water quality and quality of life for residents along the creek by protecting streamside buffers and planning for "smart-growth" within the watershed.

Cawaco RC&D joined the greenway partnership. When the partnership needed a project coordinator, Cawaco applied for a VISTA volunteer.

Hilary says, "Each VISTA volunteer hired is in the project for one year. My term is over at the end of July, but the VISTA contract is for three years. There will be someone in this position for three years. Each person who participates in the AmeriCorps program can volunteer a total of three years. I have only one more year in the program and I have the option of working one more year in this project."

AmeriCorps VISTA members successfully completing a term of service in an approved national service position are eligible to receive either a \$4,725 education award or end-of-service stipend of \$1,200. Education awards can be used to pay education costs. Throughout the VISTA employment, the individual gets a living stipend. "The stipend is very low because it is a full-time volunteer program, and, since we are working on anti-poverty issues, they want us to be able to understand what it is like to live below poverty level," says Hilary.

So what is the advantage of being an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer? According to Paul Kennedy, "When we do not have surplus, let alone adequate financial, technical or human resources, and the tasks and needs at hand are daunting, the VISTA program and the great young people that volunteer for it are a 'God send' to conservation organizations like Cawaco." From Hilary's perspective, "I'd recommend the program to anyone. It helps you get the experience that you need. For me, it helped me figure out what I want to do, what I want to go to graduate school for. It helped me get the experience I needed to get a higher level job."

Paul says, "Hilary has exceeded our goals for the Five Mile Creek Project. She is making a huge impact in a small watershed that is serving as an example for other watersheds in our area. We were able to accomplish this by looking beyond the problem."

Seeking assistance from the AmeriCorps VISTA program was a creative solution to a financial dilemma for the Cawaco RC&D Council. Could it be used in other ways for NRCS?



Hilary Aten at work on the banks of Black Creek, a tributary of Five Mile Creek, where she found acid mine drainage.

NRCS Training Updates

Cultural Resources Training

By Teresa Paglione, Cultural Resource Specialist, Auburn, AL

Cultural Resources training (Modules 7 and 8) was recently completed by new NRCS and District employees. The General Manual Part 401.24 (Training and Certification) states that "NRCS will provide training and informational materials to field personnel and other interested parties for the consideration of cultural resources in accordance with federal laws."

All NRCS employees responsible for planning or implementing NRCS programs are required to complete the training to the level designated for their position within one year of their appointment. Training sessions were held in Huntsville and Wetumpka in January and in February in Atmore on the Poarch Creek Indian Reservation.

In Huntsville, the group toured Pond Spring State Park (formerly known as the Wheeler Plantation House) and Old State Bank in Decatur, the oldest bank building in Alabama. The Wetumpka session included a guided tour of Fort Toulouse/Jackson State Park and a visit to the Alabama State Archives and History Museum in Montgomery.

Members of the Poarch Creek Indian Tribe participated in the session held on the reservation in Atmore, including Robert Thrower, the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, and his mother Gail Thrower, the Cultural Preservation Officer. The Atmore group visited Fort Mims, where University of South Alabama

archaeologists have been conducting test excavations to locate the remains of the fort walls and interior structures, including the Mims house and the nearby 1890's Montgomery Hill Baptist Church and cemetery that is listed on the National Register of Historic places.

Three houses from an 1818 cabin to the 1890's Wheeler Plantation House.



Pre-Civil War Montgomery Hill Baptist Church and cemetery were listed on the National Register of Historic places in 1988.



NRCS employees toured Fort Toulouse/Jackson. Shown is one of the reconstructed bastions of the 1814 Fort Jackson.



Robert Thrower in Creek Indian clothing that would have been popular in late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Surveying 101

By Perry Oakes, State Conservation Engineer, Auburn, AL

During the “good old days,” SCS new field employees often worked with other experienced employees who transferred surveying skills and knowledge through on-the-job training. Some employees were actually assigned to permanent surveying crews and were able to acquire valuable surveying skills that they used later in their career.

The “good old days” are long gone and NRCS often doesn’t have the luxury of placing new employees with experienced technicians for training. New employees are often thrown immediately into the working and production environment. A few years ago Surveying 101 was introduced in Alabama to help new employees develop their basic surveying skills. Fourteen students recently attended this class that will probably be held in the state every two years. To date, 44 new employees have completed the training.



New employees get hands-on training in Surveying 101.

Toolkit 5.0 Training

By Zona Beaty, Resource Conservationist, Auburn, AL

NRCS has entered a new phase of conservation planning assistance. All future conservation plans will be written using new technology. Toolkits 5.0 is a computer program that will be a vital part of the planning, contracting, and reporting systems that our



Toolkit 5.0 training are intense 3-day sessions with presentations by experienced NRCS staff with hands-on computer instruction.

agency uses to provide assistance to landusers.

All District Conservationists, Soil Conservationists, Soil Conservation Technicians, Engineers, and many of the Alabama Soil and Water Conservation District Employees will be trained by May 2005. Toolkit Database Architecture, Basic Arc-GIS, Conservation System Guides and Systems, Soils Data Management, and Conservation Planning are covered in the three-day training sessions that have been taking place weekly since February in the NRCS State Office in Auburn.

Toolkits 5.0 is a computer application that is linked to other applications that provides a complete circuit of information generated and used by the agency. The NRCS Contracting Module called ProTracts, the Progress Reporting System (PRS), the National Conservation Planning Database, and Fund Management are all interrelated with Toolkits. By October 1, 2005, all conservation plans will be developed in Toolkits 5.0.

Employees Wanted my.NRCS
Employee Intranet

Public Affairs is seeking staff members to feature in the “Employee Highlights” section of my.NRCS. If you have, or know of an employee, with an usual hobby, done something significant in the community, or accomplished something special on the job, etc., please notify Julie Best or Fay Garner in the State Office. View past stories on the my.NRCS website.

NRCS Participates in Events Across Alabama

Partnership Works to Improve Water Quality

By Danny Williams, District Conservationist, Huntsville, AL

NRCS, Alabama A&M University, and the District's Watershed Advisory Committee are partnering with a landowner in the New Hope area in Madison County to make environmental improvements on her farm. The landowner currently leases her farm for cattle production and is unhappy with the problems cattle have created for a stream flowing through her property. Sam Sandlin, Flint River Watershed Coordinator, and I visited the site and suggested that the landowner consider Continuous Conservation Reserve Program buffers.

The landowner agreed to install 38 acres of buffers consisting of hardwood and pine planting. Alabama A&M University will monitor the change in water quality created by the buffers. Water sampling is underway to create a baseline representing current conditions of the stream. Follow-up sampling will be done over the next three years to collect data on how the buffers impact water quality.

The project leader is Mike Landers, a graduate student at Alabama A&M University. Dr. Teferi Tsegaye, soil physics professor at A&M, and other A&M staff will direct the project. The School of Forestry at A&M plans to plant areas outside the buffer zone to pine and shrubs to benefit wildlife. A&M biologists will monitor the buffers use by wildlife.

The partnership plans to install a buffer to limit cattle access to the stream and improve water quality.



Participants at the Annual Farmers Conference attended a field trip to the Tuskegee National Forest.

113th Annual Farmers Conference at Tuskegee

By Gwen Lewis, District Conservationist, Tuskegee, AL

Attendees of the Tuskegee University 113th Annual Farmers Conference were excited to hear about NRCS programs during my presentation and a question and answer session. It was an opportunity to reach farmers who perhaps haven't participated in our programs.

The Annual Farmers Conference evolved out of a need to improve the conditions of rural black farmers in the South. Having just gone through slavery, black farmers in the South had a wealth of social, economic, educational and morale problems that needed attention.

Upon his arrival at Tuskegee, Booker T. Washington observed these conditions and implemented monthly meetings attended by about 75 farmers. These meetings were the stepping stones to the first Annual Farmers Conference held in 1892, which drew over 400 farmers and professional agriculture workers from all areas of the rural South. Historical milestones associated with the conference include the appointment of Thomas Monroe Campbell as the first extension agent in the United States.

The objectives of the 2005 annual farmers conference were: (1) to share up-to-date information relevant to small-scale farmers and landowners involved in production of traditional and alternative agricultural products; (2) to create awareness about family health, nutritional challenges, and existing resources for rural families; (3) to provide research-based information in a consumer adaptable format; and (4) to strengthen networks and partnerships that address problems of small scale agriculture and rural communities.



NRCS and Alabama A&M University staff discuss ways to protect this stream flowing through a farm in Madison County.

Statewide Watershed Assessment

By Vic Payne, Soil and Water Conservation Committee, Montgomery, AL

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires that each state conduct a statewide nonpoint source watershed assessment every five years. Since the last one was conducted in 1998, we are a little bit overdue.

The results of the last assessment have been widely used, not only by NRCS and SWCDs, but also by other agencies. Since the watersheds in every county were prioritized with regard to potential for nonpoint source pollution, NRCS was able to use this information to target funding to the most critical watersheds. It has also been a great benefit to the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) in compiling the many reports they have to submit to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to Congress.

The new assessment will be different in a couple of critical ways: 1) we will use the new nationwide 12-digit Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUCs) versus the old 11-digit codes, and 2) all data will be entered online.

As with the last assessment, ADEM will provide \$3,500 to each district to complete five phases of the work:

- Gathering data and ranking watersheds
- Conducting a public meeting to present the data, get input, and hear concerns
- Forming or revitalizing the District's Conservation Advisory Committee (CAC)
- Developing a watershed Plan of Action with assistance of the CAC
- Submitting the report

An interagency team consisting of NRCS, ADEM, Soil and Water Conservation Committee, Alabama Department of Public Health, and the state's Information Services Division has been working for nearly a year to develop the online assessment program. In addition, six pilot districts are using an MS Excel version of the program to initially acquire data for three of their watersheds.

"We think we've got a really good program that could become a model for other states," says Bill Hughes, NRCS State Resource Conservationist. "If nothing else, it is going to be a great resource for Alabama."

The timetable for completing the assessment is still fuzzy. Districts must be trained and then the project must be keyed into the overall NRCS workload for the year. However, we anticipate that the entire effort will be completed by November this year.

State Land Judging Event

By Julie Best, PAS, Auburn, AL

Autauga County hosted the state land judging contest this year. Twelve teams representing regional contest winners participated. Land judging is a part of the state FFA program and NRCS helps conduct the regional and state contests. The 2005 state contest winners were:

- Millry High School - 1st
- Horseshoe Bend High School - 2nd
- Douglas High School - 3rd
- Brantley High School - 4th

A special award, in honor of our former State Staff Forester Jerry Johnson, was given to the student who scored highest on the forestry segment of the contest. That award went to Landon Morgan, a member of the Brantley High School team.

"Land judging is a program that helps students learn about soil and protecting and conserving land, water, and the environment," says Troy Newton, Education Administrator with the Alabama Department of Education.

The following groups/individuals supported and sponsored the 2005 State Land Judging contest:

- Alabama Chapter SWCS
- Autauga County SWCD
- Charles Love, State Soil Scientist, NRCS
- Coaker Farms, Washington County
- Koptis Farms, Baldwin County
- Mobile County SWCD
- Pangaea Environmental Consultants
- Professional Soil Classifiers Association of Alabama
- Soils Five, Inc.

Millry High School from Washington County, the first place winning team of the state contest, will represent Alabama in the 54th National Land Judging Contest in Oklahoma in May 2005.



1st Place - Millry High School from Washington County

Auburn Hosts the 45th National Collegiate Land Judging Competition

During the week of April 4th, Auburn University was proud to host the 1st national soils contest ever to be held in Alabama, and the 45th annual national contest. Dr. Joey Shaw, Associate Professor in the Agronomy and Soils Department, coordinated the event. "We have the unique opportunity to show a couple of physiographic regions and show typical soils for those regions. We prepared 19 practice sites throughout the Piedmont and Coastal Plain. NRCS worked with us to evaluate the pits and to get them ready for student evaluation," says Shaw. The 19 sites are necessary to accommodate the 22 teams who participated in the contest.

Dr. Neil Smeck, coach for the Ohio State University team, says, "We don't do a lot to get ready for the contest. We talk about the landscapes by discussing what we have read. When we get here, we look at the practice pits, which have been described and classified by the host. The students make their own evaluations, and then we talk about the differences. We have three days to learn about the soils of the area."

Dr. Larry West, coach for the University of Georgia team, says, "By participating in the national competition, students get to see different soils in different parts of the country. It's a great learning experience."

The students worked in the practice pits on Monday-Wednesday. Individual competition was held on Thursday and team competition was held on Friday. The Virginia Tech team placed first in the competition; the high scoring individual honor went to Doug Frisco, also of Virginia Tech.



Dr. Neil Smeck, coach for the Ohio State University team, talks with Dr. Joey Shaw, Auburn University, in one of the practice pits.



Students in the collegiate land judging contest have three days to learn about the soils of the host region.

Southern Regional Conference on How To Combat Alien Invasive Plants

The citizens of Alabama are becoming increasingly aware of how extensive invasive plants have become and how the productivity and natural heritage of our lands and ecosystems are ultimately at stake. The Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Council is a regional organization dedicated to combating invasive plants and restoring native ecosystems. They are challenged to do more to fight against this alien takeover.



The Alabama Invasive Plant Council (ALIPC) is hosting a region-wide conference in Birmingham on May 3-5. The theme of the conference, "Invasive Plants: Arming to Defend and Win," is aimed at sharing the latest knowledge and technology on combating invasive plants. Everyone interested and involved in stopping the spread of alien invasive plants species is invited. The conference is the seventh in a series held by the Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Council. The conference is being held at the Carraway-Davie House and Conference Center on the southern edge of Birmingham on the bluffs overlooking the Cahaba River. Two full days of expert presentations and discussions will be followed by a third-day field tour. Registration is \$85 by April 4 and \$95 afterwards, which includes all breaks and two lunches. Vendors and sponsors are requested as well. For registration, nearby hotels, and more information visit: <http://www.se-eppc.org> or call Curtis Hansen at 334-844-1630.

NRCS Celebrates 70th Anniversary!

The Soil Conservation Act, the first soil conservation act in the history of this or any other nation, was signed by President Franklin Roosevelt on April 27, 1935. With the passage of Public Law 46, the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) was established as a permanent USDA agency. The agency, later called, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), will be 70 years old on April 27.

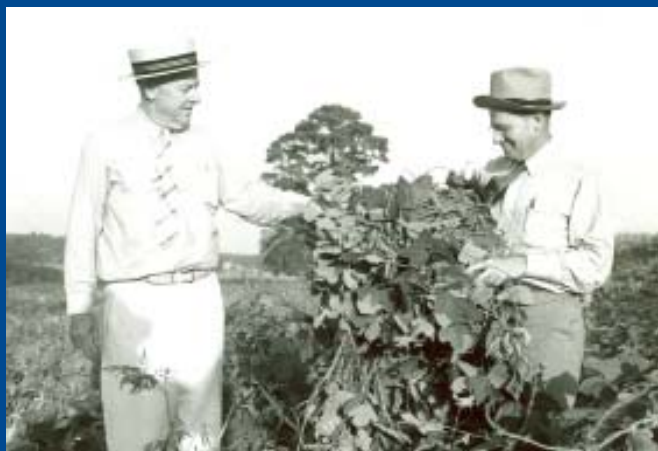
During the days of the Dust Bowl, in the early 1920's and early 30's, soil erosion became a crisis. The welfare of the nation was at risk. Hugh Hammond Bennett, soil erosion expert and the first chief of SCS/NRCS, devoted his entire career to studying soil erosion and its effects. Bennett, known as the "Father of Soil Conservation" came to believe that soil erosion was taking such a toll on farmland that, if left unchecked, it would impair the nation's ability to produce food. Through demonstrations, lectures, and articles, Bennett encouraged Americans to take action. He insisted that conservation management practices were necessary and beneficial. His determination and persuasion eventually led to the passing of the Soil Conservation Act.

Today, NRCS holds fast to the vision of Bennett and continues to support conservation efforts through programs and outreach. The 70th anniversary theme is "A Partner in Conservation Since 1935." We are proud of the agency heritage and look forward to continuing the conservation legacy that was started 70 years ago.

As part of the celebration, a 5-minute video, "A Partner in Conservation," has been developed to promote events and activities to mark the anniversary and increase agency visibility. Request copies from Julie or Fay in Public Affairs.

Read more about the beginning of SCS/NRCS and Hugh Hammond Bennett at the following web sites:

- www.nc.nrcs.usda.gov/about/History/Hugh-Bennett.html
- www.soil.ncsu.edu/about/century/hugh.html
- www.nwf.org/halloffame/inductees_bennett.html



Hugh Hammond Bennett (l) visited Alabama in July 1939 for the Kudzu Jamboree at Camp Hill, Alabama. Bennett and Regional Agronomist R.Y. Bailey exam kudzu plot at the Alabama Experiment Station.

KUDZU! grown on purpose?

PERSONNEL

Promotions

Autry Burns, Soil Conservation Technician, Rainsville, AL
Renea Dyer, Soil Conservationist, Florence, AL to District Conservationist, Florence, AL
Maurice Johnson, Soil Conservation Technician, Greensboro, AL
Stephon Thomas, Soil Scientist, Huntsville, AL
Walker Williams, Soil Conservationist, Evergreen, AL to District Conservationist, Evergreen, AL

Reassignments

Anne Cross, Soil Conservationist, Brewton, AL to Guntersville, AL
Butch Kelley, Construction Inspector, Andalusia, AL to Soil Conservation Technician, Andalusia, AL
Sylvia Long, Soil Conservationist, Auburn, AL to Soil Scientist, Marion, AL (duty station Auburn, AL)
Deana Mann, Soil Conservationist, Guntersville, AL to Scottsboro, AL
Joyce Nicholas, Soil Conservationist, Bay Minette, AL to Marion, AL
Stephon Thomas, Soil Scientist, Huntsville, AL to Soil Scientist, Tuscaloosa, AL

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